

Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group
Report of June 15, 2004, for the
EXPANDED NATURAL RESOURCES INTERIM COMMITTEE
on July 7, 2004
Working Group Chairman Representative Bert Stevenson

The working group continued its discussion of supplemental and domestic water rights. Three broad categories of supplemental water rights were outlined. Supplemental water rights are established by category with specific conditions pertaining to their use. It is possible for water rights to change over time allowing a supplemental water right to become a primary water right or vice versa.

Idaho Code is very specific about domestic water use and limits it to ½ acre or 13,000 gallons per day. Historically, application includes in-house usage, stock watering, and irrigation. Domestic use of ground water is exempt from water rights, but surface water is not.

Eventually each working group will identify common themes and make recommendations to the larger committee that could include statutory changes and finances. Short-term solutions should address water quantity issues that are practical, economically feasible, and provide the best financial return. Long-term solutions need to protect water rights, the basin and the aquifer. Everyone should share in these solutions because everyone will benefit.

One option may be buying and permanently retiring water rights. Curtailment is another option on a year to year basis, but harsh.

Domestic use is one of the common themes being identified as impacting aquifers around the state. Land use planning may offer opportunities to maximize domestic land and water use. Developers could be required to install community systems instead of individual wells in new subdivisions, keep water shares with property rather than selling them prior to development, or using canal water and pressurized systems for domestic irrigation. Land use planning at the state or local level could also address issues like density, lot size, area of impact, open space and cooperation between city and county governments. If changes in land use code are adopted statewide, this could level the playing field for development in Idaho and help avoid problems experienced in other areas of the West like Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Spokane.

The working group postponed reports from the Mountain Home Groundwater Advisory Committee on irrigation and domestic water. The final draft of the advisory group's Groundwater Management Plan will be reviewed for discussion at the next meeting.

The Mountain Home Working Group will meet again at 9:30 a.m. on July 16, 2004.